"Old Culture of the Copper Eskimos

The geographical center of the Copper Eskimos' country may be taken as Coronation Gulf, but they extend from Dolphin and Union Strait and Prince Albert Sound in the west to Kent Peninsula and Albert Edward Bay in the east. In 1916 their total number was roughly estimated at between 700 and 800, scattered in groups of from 20 to 100 in different districts. For food these Eskimos depended on seals in winter, caribou and fish in summer; hence while they were able to concentrate in settlements on the sea ice from November to April, the rest of the year they were dispersed into small bands of from two to eight persons in order to scour the land for the scattered herds of caribou. Wood is extremely scarce throughout this region except inland in the valleys of the Coppermine and Tree Rivers, and so wooden dwellings such as are used by the natives to the west were unknown; the Copper Eskimos lived in snow huts throughout the winter months, and moved into tents of caribou skin in the warm days of spring. For clothing they wore caribou-skin coats shaped very much like a European dress coat, short in front and with a long swallow-tail behind; a hood, attached at the back, pulled over the head like a cap; they had short caribou-skin stockings that extended up under them. Over the stockings they wore in winter white sealskin shoes that fastened around the ankles, but in summer they had waterproof boots of the same material that fastened below the

knees. The women's dress was much the same as the men's, the main difference being that in the coat the hood and back and shoulders were enlarged to carry the baby, while the socks and waterproof boots, instead of fitting tightly around the legs, were broad and open and fastened by a long tapering strap into the belt.

Even as late as 1914 the Copper Eskimos were still in what might be called the stone age. Hanbury twelve years earlier had found practically no iron at all in use. For hunting caribou the bow and arrow were universally employed, while for seals there was a harpoon fitted with a copper point. Fish nets were unknown; salmon, trout, and tomcod being either caught with copper hooks at the end of a long line or trapped in stone weirs and speared with tridents having barbs of either copper or antler. No pottery was made; instead, the Eskimos carved rectangular cooking vessels out of soapstone. Heather or dry willow twigs were the usual fuels in summer, but in winter seal oil was burned in shallow soapstone lamps by means of long wicks of cotton grass seed. The only means of transportation were the sled in winter and packing on the back in summer; the kayak was employed for hunting only, while the larger Eskimo skin boat, umiak, had dropped out of use altogether. [547]

The social and domestic life of the Copper Eskimos was equally primitive. There were no chiefs or persons in authority, even the shamans having no influence beyond that inspired by their personalities and character. Food was shared among all the

members of the community, but all other property was held individually. Marriage took place at an early age but had little permanence until a child was born, when the couple usually settled down for life. Polygamy was rare owing to the preponderance of males over females and the difficulty of supporting more than one wife; while polyandry, though not unknown, was discountenanced because it invariably led to quarrels and even murder. The health of the natives was exceedingly good, the only conspicuous ailments apparently bei ng simple colds, which affected them transiently each autumn when they moved from tents into the more tightly-sealed snow huts, and some derangement of the stomach that may have been ptomaine poisoning. The average longevity seems to have been about sixty years, and the women were as fertile perhaps as other races; but the natural increase due to the birth rate was overbalanced by the extraordinary frequency of infanticide. This, together with the frequency of murder and the prevalence of the blood feud, constituted the most serious blot on the social life of these Eskimos."

16: Collinson--200-202. (1852-53) 1855 Copper Eskimo
116, 105

"On our arrival, [in Cambridge Bay] we at once established a communication with the natives, who were diffident at first, this being their earliest communication with white men. The number hunting in the immediate vicinity amounted to less than 100, but before the winter set in others resorted to Cambridge Bay, attracted no doubt by the wonderful novelty. They belong to the Central tribe of Esquimaux, wearing the same costume and speaking a similar dialect to the Igloolik and Boothia Isthmus people; and unlike Greenland and Behring Strait tribes, who perform almost all their migrations by sea, these people travel over the land and ice with sleighs. The journey to Victoria Land is performed previous to the breaking up of the ice in the summer, and having no oomiaks, and but one or two kayaks, their communication with the continent is cut off until the straits are bridged over by the frost; they then assemble between Cape Colborne and the Finlayson Islands, which is the great crossing-place for the reindeer, and, after they have obtained as many as possible, pick up their caches of fish and venison, and return to the continent for the winter. They frequently visited us, bringing children of all ages even upon the coldest days, but we only could induce them once to remain all night, when they enjoyed the dancing and singing upon the lower deck, and went to rest perfectly satisfied. Unfortunately, the following morning was the usual one for the weekly inspection of the men under arms; and after breakfast, when the ship's company began to take down their muskets and cutlasses, they became alarmed, and crept away before

we were aware of it. Otherwise they were upon very good terms, becoming latterly expert in picking up whatever they could lay their hands upon, and occasioning the necessity of a vigilant look out. [201]

In addition to their performing their annual migration on land instead of by water, they differ from the other tribes by inhabiting snow houses during the winter, and have therefore no fixed place of abode, all their necessaries being carried upon sleighs. The house is built in the course of two or three hours, and all trace of it disappears in the ensuing summer. Very few iron implements were found among them, the most warlike being a spear-shaped knife made of native copper; while their arrows are tipped with the same, or made of bone and flint. On one occasion they were induced to show their skill by shooting from the forecastle at the mast-head vane, and struck it frequently. They seldom cook their food, the frost apparently acting as a substitute for fire. Biscuit and sugar the children latterly acquired a taste for, but salt appeared always an abomination.

The do not use drift-wood or grass for fuel, but content themselves with the stone-lamp fed by seals' blubber, which enables them to thaw the snow for a drink. Spirits and tobacco they have as yet no notion of; and, unlike their brethren on the E. and W., are free from vermin on their persons. A distance of several years was always observed to intervene in the ages of the children of the same family, which must be occasioned, I presume, by the difficulty of supporting them. All the drudgery falls upon the women;

even the boys would transfer their loads to their sisters. Bears' claws, deer's teeth, and bills of birds are hung about their coats; the mothers frequently pointing with pride to these evidences of success in their children. The limited means of communication which we possessed prevented our ascertaining whether any form of religion existed. One man of the tribe lived by himself in a tent, and appeared to be regarded as the Angekok. The dresses with the exception of those of the young girls and children, who use bear-skin, were made almost entirely of rein-deer skins sewed together with sinew by copper needles. Some of the men were tall and well made; the distinguishing features being a broad face, square forehead, and flat nose; hair coarse and black, no whiskers, and but little on the upper lip and chin. The women are generally low of stature, and disfigured on the cheek by tattooing. Among those seen the preceding year were a few with aquiline noses and a Jewish cast of countenance, forming a curious contrast with the remainder of the tribe. The tribes appear to be separated from each other by a neutral ground, across which small parties venture in the summer for barter. The limit of these people westerly appears to be the Dolphin and Union Strait, beyond which the costume alters--the oomiak and the labret appear, showing an immediate connexion with the Behring Strait tribe. They do not, however, extend all the way to Point Barrow, but terminate at Herschel Island, whence, in the summer, trading [202] parties resort to Barter Island, where they meet not only the Point Barrow people, but also the Rat Indians, who descend from the Hudson Bay Company's post, Fort Yucon, and barter

muskets, powder, beads, and knives, for furs. A party of these Indians were brought on board by the Esquimaux just as we were leaving Camden Bay, in July, 1854, when they at once produced a note from Mr. Hardisty, the clerk in charge of that post."

27:Chown & Lewis D-5 (1958)1959
ND5 Copper Eskimo ND5

[P.13, A]

The Blood Group Genes of the Copper Eskimo[1]

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121 143 [131] This report deals with the blood group and secretor genes of the so-called Copper Eskimo living on Victoria Island and the neighboring mainland, roughly between 100° and 120° west latitude and from the Arctic Circle to 72° north longitude. The report is part of a continuing study under the aegis of the National Museum of Canada of the populations which go to make up the population of Canada.

105 101 [161] The Copper Eskimo form an almost pure-bred population of about 1000 which has been stationary as to numbers since they were first studied by Jenness ('23) in 1913–16. Where they came from and how long they have lived here is unknown. The caribou and seal were their mainstays, providing food, clothing, fuel and housing materials, while in their territory was native copper which they used both for manufacture and for trade. Neither the east nor the west offered greater attractions, while the south was barred by Athapaskan-speaking Indians. It seems probable that they have occupied their present territory for a long time. On the other hand it is not to be imagined that they lived in complete isolation. Their neighbors 300 miles to the west about the delta of the Mackenzie knew of them, but only dimly; they spoke of them as "the people afar off." To the east and southeast they 175 had some slight contact with other Eskimo, and undoubtedly there was some intermar- 648 riage. With the Indians to the south they were apparently in a constant state of war, of small raids of extermination. So the earliest record we have of them is in Samuel Hearne's journal of his journey from Fort Prince of Wales on Hudson Bay to the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771; in that venture the Indians who accompanied Hearne killed every Eskimo there encamped. Even so, from tales we were told, it is reasonable to believe that in other raids an occasional Indian woman

[1] [footnotes appear on p. 13B.—Analyst]

28: Jenness E-5 (1914-1916) 1946
NDG Copper Eskimo NDG

MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE COPPER ESKIMO

INTRODUCTION

In 1914, when the Canadian Arctic Expedition established its headquarters at Bernard Harbour in Dolphin and Union Strait, on the western fringe of Copper Eskimo territory, the natives preserved their old culture, virtually unimpaired, despite contact with several explorers in the middle of the nineteenth century, and with others during the early years of the twentieth. The only visible change caused by these contacts was the introduction of a considerable quantity of iron, which the Eskimo hammered cold, as they hammered their native copper, and had already substituted for copper in knives, adzes, harpoon heads, and needles. From lack of ammunition the only men who possessed rifles, five in number, had fallen back on the bow and arrow, which was still the universal weapon of the chase. Of the arrows not tipped with bone about two-thirds bore tips of hammered copper and only one-third tips of iron; the ice chisel and other tools retained their copper blades and points; and the soapstone pot for cooking meat held undisputed sway in every household. All clothing was of skin or fur, mainly from the caribou and the seal; and in cut and adornment it followed without change the styles set by earlier generations. The blubber of the seal, burned in a soapstone lamp, provided the only artificial light, and throughout the winter months all the energies of the Eskimo were concentrated on the pursuit of seals at their breathing holes in the sea ice.

Ten years later the situation had undergone a profound change. Native copper had become practically valueless and served for rivets only. Bows and arrows had disappeared, because every native was now armed with a high-powered rifle. Other weapons and tools had steel or iron blades, metal cooking pots had ousted the soapstone vessels, and primus lamps and kerosene lanterns were spreading from house to home. Fur clothing was tending to follow western Eskimo patterns, and to be overlaid with bead-work, or with imported garments of cotton or wool. Dissatisfied with the old-fashioned snow-hut and skin-covered kayak, one native had even erected a plank cabin heated by an iron stove, and purchased a motor-boat to transport his household goods along the coast during the brief summer months. The tentacles of the fur trade had firmly gripped the region, and the trapping of foxes, animals of no economic importance in earlier times, now rivalled in importance the hunting of seals and caribou.

Fortunately, before this revolution occurred, the Canadian Arctic Expedition had brought out a large collection of Copper Eskimo specimens, nearly all of which are now stored in the National Museum at Ottawa. These specimens, and

29: Jenness E-5 (1914-1916) 1959
ND8 Copper Eskimo ND8

although they mentioned huts of stone, still standing in certain places, that a race of dwarfs had built in earlier days. Could it be that the natives had simply forgotten the customs of their forefathers, or was this wooden house in their country a relic of some ancient tribe that had either moved westward or become extinct?

Many small differences between the Eskimos here and their kinsmen in the Mackenzie River delta spoke in favour of the second theory. The Coronation Gulf people possessed no large open boats such as the western natives used for travelling along the coast, and they never employed the one-man canoes or kayaks for hunting seals. Their tools and weapons were much less varied, their clothing of different pattern, and their skill in carving greatly inferior. Altogether their culture seemed less developed than that of the western Eskimos, although the people themselves were not inferior in intelligence.

A year later Girling excavated a wooden house close to the ruin we had discovered on this journey. The objects he recovered from its floor, after removing the surface soil, were entirely strange to the local Eskimos, although familiar to some Alaskan natives, who had unearthed many similar specimens in their own country. Since then one discovery has succeeded another, so that today we know that the people among whom I wandered for two years had themselves moved into

1: Jenness, Diamond. The Life of the Copper Eskimos. Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-18, Vol. XII, Pt. a. Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1922.

Pp. 5-277; preface; 9 pls.; 69 text figs.; 2 maps; index.

Yale: S23.625.v.12a.

[AW: This is the best single source on the Copper Eskimo. Jenness was a thorough ethnographer and his material is systematically presented.

The illustrations suitable for line reproduction have been included in the files and the full table of illustrations is given in category 116.

Jenness spent two years, 1914-1916, with the Copper Eskimo, but for this volume and certain other reports of the Canadian Arctic Expedition which include comparative material from other Eskimo groups, the wider date, 1913-1916, is used as the field work date.]

2: Stefánsson, Vilhjálmur. The Stefánsson-Anderson Arctic Expedition of the American Museum: Preliminary Ethnological Report. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XIV, Pt. 1. New York, 1914.

Intro. Clark Wissler; pp. 395; 95 figs.; 2 maps; index; voluminous corrections and comments at back.

Yale: Nk10. Am45e. v. 14.

[AW: This is one of the basic sources on the Copper Eskimo by a leading authority on Eskimo Ethnography. It is full and detailed on economic activities and material culture, but many other aspects of the culture are treated very summarily. The expedition reported here was made between 1908 and 1912 during which time Stefánsson visited not only the Copper Eskimo, but several other Eskimo groups as well.]